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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 003889

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SUBJECT: FATA UPDATE - 19 DECEMBER 2008

REF: PESHAWAR 538

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) Summary. Consulate Peshawar personnel report that rocket attacks are becoming a near-daily occurrence throughout Peshawar, but continue to result in little damage and very few deaths. Government of Pakistan (GoP) and Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) officials have noted to Ambassador and other Emboffs that Swat District is steadily falling into the hands of the taliban, with the most notable change being increasing taliban activity in Mingora near the district capital of Saidu Sharif. Several recent incidents have been particularly brutal, and the level of fear and intimidation among the population is rising, while the police presence is declining. Despite security conditions, the USG distributed 2,000 essential food item packages to internally displaced persons in the NWFP on the occasion of the Eid holidays. Additionally, as part of our effort to advance Pakistani civ-mil cooperation and increase their ability to do counterinsurgency, the Bajaur Political Agent spent three hours on December 16 distributing 275 non-food item kits to families affected by the recent military operations in his agency. End Summary.

PESHAWAR SECURITY UPDATE

12. (C) Consulate Peshawar reports that rocket attacks in and around Peshawar District have become a daily occurrence. Typically, the attacks result in little damage and few casualties. According to security personnel at the Consulate, some of the rockets now appear to be remotely timed and detonated, which is believed to be a new tactic being used by the area insurgency. On December 16, a rocket hit approximately 800 meters from the Consulate, and on December 18, a Consulate contract guard was killed, along with some members of his family, when a rocket hit his house, approximately five kilometers northwest of the Consulate. (Note. The Consulate and Diplomatic Security Foundation are preparing donations for the guard's surviving family. End note.) Consulate personnel are in discussions with the local security forces to do more patrolling in an attempt to curb the sporadic, indiscriminate rocket attacks.

13. (U) On December 18, the religious political party, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), staged a protest in Peshawar to urge the provincial government to disallow the transit of supplies for NATO forces in Afghanistan through Pakistan. Led by party chief Qazi Hussain Ahmad, approximately three thousand protesters took to the streets in a peaceful protest to

oppose NATO and U.S. policies. (Septel)

SWAT SECURITY SITUATION DETERIORATING

14. (C) In recent conversations with Ambassador and other Embassy officers, National Assembly Members (MNAs) and senior GOP officials, including Chief of Army Staff General Kayani, have expressed concern with the deteriorating security situation in Swat District in the NWFP. Several sources, including an MNA from Swat, have told us that at least half the police force has deserted, and the Army is increasingly restricted to large bases. Insurgents have now openly crossed the river into Mingora, which had historically been relatively safe and well-protected. According to national level and provincial level authorities, the GOP has no intention of initiating any kind of military operations in Swat for at least the next few months, believing that they would not be able to produce any positive results at this time. While tensions with India are an obvious impediment to moving troops from the Indian border to Swat or elsewhere, Gen. Kayani has told the Ambassador that even if that were not the case, troops are not properly trained to do what is needed to reassert control in Swat.

15. (C) There have been a number of particularly brutal killings recently, which have reportedly succeeded in greatly intimidating the population. A female NGO worker who had criticized the taliban was killed, and her body desecrated while neighbors were present. (reftel) A prominent anti-taliban religious leader was killed by taliban, who

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later exhumed his body and hung it up in public. In addition, Embassy PAO and Consulate Peshawar have received communications from mission contacts, including a Fulbright alumnus residing in Swat, asking that American personnel cease all communication with them. They reported that the taliban have been conducting home-to-home searches, including computers, for signs of western, especially American, contacts, which - in the taliban view - include emails from western addresses on the home computer and American souvenirs. According to these contacts, any individual deemed to be sympathetic to the American cause will be tortured and killed.

SMALL, BUT PROMISING, STEPS ON THE COIN FRONT

16. (SBU) As part of our Bajaur counterinsurgency strategy, the US Mission has been working with civilian and military counterparts in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and NWFP on better civ-mil communication and on a closer relationship between anti-militant kinetic operations and assistance to the population. As part of this effort, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) had pre-positioned relief supplies in Khar, Bajaur's capital, for those affected by the military operations in the Agency. After initial Political Agent (PA) reluctance to distribute the kits, a meeting of FATA Secretariat, Army (11th Corps), Frontier Corps, and USG reps decided that, despite the Political Agent's concerns about precise tribal balance, sufficiency of supplies, etc, the kits should be distributed. On December 16, he did so, handing out 175 non-food item kits to families. More than 400 people participated in the highly-anticipated distribution, with the PA staying on site for the entire three hours of delivery, without incident. We will meet again with the PA in the next week to discuss how well the kits were received, as well as how to sustain the momentum of GoP assistance to the population, even as anti-militant operations proceed. Additionally, the PA also participated in a second distribution of over 400 more non-food item kits to families in Bajaur on December 19.

DISTRIBUTION OF AID TO IDPS

17. (U) On December 8, during the recent Eid-ul-Adha holiday, the Embassy, in coordination with the GOP Ministry for Social Welfare and Women's Development office in Peshawar, distributed 2,000 essential food packages to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout the NWFP. The food packages contained five kilograms of rice, five kilograms of sugar and one kilogram of tea. Of the 2,000 food parcels, 870 packages were delivered to the IDP families in Nowshera and Marden while another 1,130 packages were distributed in Charsadda. (Note. These packages benefited an estimated 15,000 families. End note.)
PATTERSON